

## **San Bernardino Sun (also ran in Inland Valley Daily Bulletin)**

### **SoCal pollution emergency?**

**Officials aim to get declaration from governor, president**

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[Article Launched: 05/03/2007 12:00:00 AM PDT](#)

With air pollution killing several thousand people each year in the region, Southern California officials today may ask the governor and president to declare a state of emergency.

"We need pressure to be placed on the (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency) and the California Air Resources Board to fight this air pollution," San Bernardino County Supervisor Gary Ovitt said.

Ovitt is scheduled to be sworn in today as president of the Southern California Association of Governments, the regional planning agency made up of six counties.

During the SCAG meeting today, Ovitt and others will ask the members to approve making the request.

"It's an emergency situation. People are dying," he said.

The EPA and the state Air Resources Board have jurisdiction over cars, trucks, trains, ships and planes, which spew most of the pollution.

Of greatest concern are the minuscule flecks generated by diesel emissions, called particulate matter. The smaller the particle, the more dangerous it is.

"They (SCAG) have the same concerns about the grave nature of PM2.5," said Sam Atwood, spokesman for the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

PM2.5 is particulate matter that is 2.5 microns in diameter, roughly one-thirtieth the thickness of a human hair.

The AQMD has jurisdiction over factories, refineries, and other businesses, but has virtually no authority over vehicles.

The agency last year tried to restrict idling by locomotives but its rules were thrown out this week by a federal judge.

The AQMD in June will adopt a plan to clean the air of particulates by the federal deadline in 2015, but there's no chance to meet that target without tougher regulations on vehicles from the EPA and the state, officials said.

"We will need extraordinary measures to reduce those emissions and meet those standards," said Mark Pisano, executive director of SCAG. "It's of the magnitude of other disasters in the nation."

Most of the diesel pollution comes from the exploding freight-movement industry. About 40percent of all imports in the country come through the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach before heading east on trucks and trains through the Inland Empire.

The country is benefitting while the region suffers the bulk of health effects, Pisano said.

An emergency declaration could speed up action, he said.

For example, the EPA or state air board could delegate authority to the local air district to impose regulations.

To meet the 2015 fine particulate standard, the region needs to knock more than 200 tons per day of oxides of nitrogen out of the air. The AQMD's plan is more than 70 tons per day short without help from federal and state regulators.

State air board officials were not available for comment late Wednesday, but in the state's draft air plan released last week, officials say some of the measures proposed by the AQMD are either technically infeasible or impossibly expensive.

Emergency declarations are often made after disasters, and free up money for repairs and other needs.

Ovitt speculated a declaration could provide funding to replace older, dirty diesel engines.

Until SCAG makes a formal request, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's office declined to comment.

"It wouldn't be appropriate to comment on something that has not yet been presented to this office," said Bill Maile, a spokesman for the governor.

Schwarzenegger has emerged as a national leader on environmental issues and is pushing the federal government to allow the state to impose tougher requirements on emissions of greenhouse gases from vehicles.

The EPA and the state air board have imposed tougher requirements on diesel emissions, and more regulations are in the works.

The air is far cleaner than it was 20 years ago, but progress stalled in recent years with the increase in freight movement and a growing population.

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